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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD RESIDENTS DISCUSS IMPACT OF UPCOMING U.S.
FORCE WITHDRAWALS

Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Counselor John G. Fox for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: In recent encounters with emboffs, Baghdad residents and community leaders offered their views about security and the effect of U.S. combat forces' withdrawal, to be completed by the end of June, from urban areas. Iraqi attitudes toward the withdrawal are somewhat schizophrenic - pitting national pride against sober assessments of continuing threats. Many fear the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are not yet up to the task while others argue that the absence of U.S. troops from the streets will take the wind from the sails of extremists who depend on "foreign occupation" as a rallying cry. End summary.

12. (C) During a May 7 visit to a social science graduate school in Mansour, West Baghdad, a group of 15 Iraqi degree candidates and academics (mainly Sunni Arabs, with a couple of Shi'a and a Kurd) discussed with emboffs their views of the current security situation and the U.S. combat troops' withdrawal from their neighborhoods. A majority of this group said they perceive recent declines in security and feel less safe walking the streets of their neighborhoods than they did a few months ago.

13. (SBU) All but one of this group said they are extremely worried about the June withdrawal of U.S. combat troops. Most attendees believed the Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), the Shi'a militia which terrorized many Sunni neighborhoods in West Baghdad between 2005 and 2008, is dormant but still present. The students and teachers fretted that JAM would emerge from the shadows as U.S. troops pull out, and doubted whether the Iraqi Security Forces have either the will or the wherewithal to challenge them.

14. (C) One Shi'a member of the group, originally from Karbala, begged to differ. Iraq's security forces are increasingly capable of maintaining law and order, he said, and the time is right for CF withdrawals. Acknowledging the help and sacrifices of the U.S. forces, "no one is happy with foreign occupation," he added.

15. (SBU) On the margins of the Kadimiya District Council sessions on May 16, poloffs heard a range of views about the withdrawals. Kadimiya district, in North Baghdad, is predominantly Shi'a, although the district also covers the predominantly Sunni agricultural districts of Taji. Kadimiya's gold-festooned shrine, which attracts Shi'a pilgrims from all over Iraq, Iran, and elsewhere, has made it a repeated target of choice for bombings by sectarian extremists, including an April 28 suicide bombing near the shrine which killed about 30 and wounded dozens more.

16. (SBU) Security concerns overshadowed the proceedings of the Kadimiya District Council's Essential Services Committee meeting, which was held before a plenary session. Much of the discussion revolved around coordination, and the lack thereof, between the municipality and the ISF as DC members sought to reopen streets sealed off by concrete barriers installed as countermeasures against car bombings. Restoring

parking privileges, removing abandoned vehicles, and facilitating the passage of city workers through check-points were other security-related matters that concerned the committee.

¶17. (C) Ali Sha'yia al-Shammari, chair of the District Council's Security Committee, told us that the authorities are constantly working to strike the right balance between facilitating public access to the shrine and minimizing the risk of attacks it can attract. Shammari and Hamid al-Bakhiti, Deputy Chair of the District Council, were cautious in assessing the impact of coming CF withdrawals. Qcautious in assessing the impact of coming CF withdrawals. They expressed a strong preference that the gap be filled by Iraqi Army (IA) units, rather than Iraqi Police (IP), whom they view as corrupt and incompetent. (Note: Apparently indicative of their status, IP recruits double as tea boys at the district council meetings. End note.)

¶18. (C) Shammari and Bakhiti privately worried that the IA might not have enough units and equipment to effectively fill the void that will be left in Kadimiya's neighborhoods when U.S. forces withdraw. A U.S. Army officer helping to secure the DC meeting told us that his working-level IA counterparts privately hold the same view, hoping the CF withdrawals would be put in slow-motion to give IA units more time to prepare. These same working-level IA officers were loath to voice this opinion in front of their superior officers, the U.S. officer added. Shammari and Bakhiti admitted they took comfort in the knowledge that U.S. units would be on Forward Operating Bases on the edges of the city and available to assist as the need arises.

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¶19. (C) Sayyed Amin, a District Council member from Taji, in the mainly Sunni northern reaches of the district, strongly believed that Sons of Iraq (or "Awakening Council") armed neighborhood watch units needed to be kept intact for the time being, notwithstanding GOI plans to integrate 20 percent of them into the ISF and absorb the rest into public or private sector jobs. In the last two years, the SOI had succeeded in chasing al-Qaeda in Iraq operatives out of Taji, Amin observed, and now is not the time to disband them. Amin said he strongly hopes that the June withdrawal of U.S. forces who have been mentoring the SOI would not damage the program.

¶110. (C) Qays Jabbar, a civil engineer responsible for public works projects in the Kadimiya district, told poloff he strongly favors U.S. withdrawals and hopes they will proceed on schedule. The withdrawals are essential for both the U.S. and Iraqi Governments to preserve their credibility, Qays said. They would also give the Iraqi Security Forces a needed opportunity to showcase their capabilities and earn the public's trust. Above all, Qays underlined, the absence of U.S. combat forces from Baghdad's streets would deprive extremists of their principal excuse for violence, with the net effect of greatly improving security.

¶111. (C) Opinion among political elites toward the withdrawals is similarly divided. Hassan Deghan al-Janabi, a member of the Iraqi Parliament's Security and Defense Committee, told poloffs on May 18 he is deeply worried about the withdrawals and thinks the prospect of increased violence should outweigh U.S. obligations to withdraw under the Security Agreement. The bottom line, he stressed, is that the ISF are not yet up to the task of securing a country faced with myriad threats.

¶112. (C) Sa'ad Mutalibi, formerly on Mouafaq Ruba'ie's National Security Council Staff and now an aide to the Minister of State for National Reconciliation, told poloff on May 19 that, while he understands citizens' concerns, he firmly believes the time is right for U.S. withdrawals. "This will be an opportunity for the ISF to show it can perform and force us Iraqis to solve issues we have been

putting to the side," Mutalibi stated. Mutalibi also echoed the view that the absence of U.S. forces from the streets would take the wind from the sails of extremists who live to rail against the "occupation."

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